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C.I.A. Says New Radar in Siberia Is 'Potentially Quite Vulnerable'

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 24 — A senior Central Intelligence Agency official has told Congress that the Soviet radar under construction north of Krasnoyarsk is a "potentially quite vulnerable" installation. As a result, the official said, some intelligence analysts believe the radar may have limited suitability for any future Soviet antiballistic missile defense.

The assessment was provided by Robert M. Gates, the Deputy Director of Intelligence, in a written response to a question submitted to the agency from Senator William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin.

Mr. Gates is also the chairman of the National Intelligence Council, which prepares the Government's classified assessments of Soviet strategic force developments.

The C.I.A. response represents the most complete disclosure to date of classified intelligence analyses on the radar's vulnerabilities. The response is contained in a recently published record of a joint hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee.

U.S. Accuses Soviet

The Reagan Administration has charged that the Soviet Union has violated an important provision of the antiballistic missile treaty of 1972 by building a large phased-array radar at the small town of Abalakovo north of Krasnoyarsk, a city in central Siberia. The 1972 treaty stipulates that radars of this type must be on the periphery of a country and oriented outward. The C.I.A. has affirmed the charge.

Many experts who are critical of the Administration's arms control policies agree that the radar is a violation of the antiballistic missile treaty.

A separate debate has been carried on within the Administration over the possible military use of the radar.

The Defense Department has stressed that the radar might be a "long lead time element" in an eventual Soviet nationwide antiballistic missile system. Such radars "constitute the foundation for any system of territorial defense," Richard N. Perle, an Assistant Defense Secretary, has said.

Could Give an Early Warning

C.I.A. officials have said the radar at Abalakovo could be used for detecting and tracking missiles to provide early warning of an American attack.

But such tracking data from the radar could also be used "to feed an ABM system," Lawrence K. Gershwin, a national intelligence officer for strategic programs at the C.I.A., told the committee hearing in June. This would be done by sending tracking data to other radars that would direct interceptors at incoming missiles.

Mr. Gershwin, who also serves on the National Intelligence Council, cautioned that this does not mean that "necessarily the Soviets intend to have a nationwide ABM system as a result."

Mr. Gates, responding in writing to questions submitted by Senator Proxmire after the June hearing, went beyond the C.I.A. testimony in June and took note of the radar's possible vulnerabilities. The hearing record and Mr. Gates's responses were published recently.

Phased-array radars, such as the one at Krasnoyarsk, "are large fixed installations, vulnerable to direct attack, and they are potentially susceptible to degradation from nuclear blackout effects," Mr. Gates said.

A Debate on Suitability

Mr. Gates said there was a debate among intelligence analysts over the "suitability" of the Abalakovo radar for an ABM system. "These radars appear less suitable for ABM battle management to some analysts than to other analysts," he said.

"Because such radars are fixed, and they are key nodes for an ABM system's capability, there will always be an issue of whether an ABM system is worth having which depends to a great extent on a few, potentially quite vulnerable facilities," he said.

Mr. Gates also said that the C.I.A. "remains concerned" about the Soviet Union's "potential" to deploy a widespread antiballistic missile system and that the deployment of such a system "would pose serious national security problems."

A classified 1984 assessment entitled "Implications of a New Soviet Phased-Array Radar," which Administration officials have said was drafted by C.I.A. officials and coordinated by intelligence workers, also identified some of the potential vulnerabilities of the Abalakovo radar, Administration officials have said.



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Phased-array radar is being built at Abalakovo, near Krasnoyarsk.